In a contemporary world faced with the challenges of globalization one witnesses distinct cultures being forced from the outside to turn gradually into a transnational, global culture. But paradoxically, rather than necessitating to depend less on cultural difference and identities, rather than succumbing to global Sameness, previously distinct cultures suffer an anxiety about the perceived loss of identity, thus requiring the continuing construction and maintenance of identity and authenticities in order to continue to be able to assert their “selves”. In this context the pursuit of a genuine identity becomes a complicated undertaking.

The central concern of my thesis is represented by cultural identity and its representation via literary texts. Starting from the idea of pluralism that lies at the heart of postmodernism and implicitly post-colonialism I used Edward Said’s seminal work and his classification of post-colonial literature as a basis for my selection of writers. Thus, the first writer that I analyzed – Chinua Achebe – belongs to one category while the next two – Rohinton Mistry and Diran Adebayo – could be included in another category. I believe that by choosing writers belonging to different categories as well as writers from the same category I shall be able to prove the variety of ways in which identity can be constructed and the fact that all cultures and identities relate to each other as much as they are distinct from each other. Also the three writers come from completely different backgrounds which would also add up to the creation of a more accurate image of the deployment of literary texts in the assertion of one’s cultural identity.

This analytic approach will help me, on the one hand, to make an adequate comparison between post-imperial writers coming from various parts of the formerly colonized space and, on the other hand, to draw a conclusion with respect to patterns that may arguably be used by these writers to assert their Otherness/difference from the metropolis and construct their respective identities. As it will be pointed out within the theoretical assumptions presented in the following lines, two things are central to my research: firstly, the mutual influences and interrelatedness with respect to the issue of identity between the colonizer and the colonized and secondly the idea that identity presupposes a difference against which to define itself, an idea introduced in theory by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida and later developed by other cultural theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall. That is why I looked at the understandings of difference/Otherness in order to pinpoint the construction of identity. In fact both categories require equal attention and indeed post-colonialism is a project that heavily relies on discourses of Otherness and Sameness in order to give an answer to the complex problem regarding the construction of
identity. The construction of identity, I argue, takes place along a continuum from Sameness to Otherness, these two concepts being the poles along which identity is defined.

The theoretical chapter entitled “Colonialism and Postcolonialism – A Brief Intellectual History” is an attempt to introduce the reader into the complex problematic of post-colonial studies. Basic characteristics of both colonialism and Postcolonialism are presented in an attempt to create a comprehensive image of the theory that provides the background of the texts to be analyzed. With respect to colonialism the focus is on the cultural conditions that produced and were produced by colonialism. These cultural constructions may be seen as a series of dichotomous pairs dividing the colonizer and the colonized. As constructions of Self and Other these pairs reproduce images of colonized languages and cultures and colonizing languages and cultures. Racial prejudices, the emptiness of colonial lands, the lack of culture and history characterizing the natives, the dichotomies of center versus periphery, adult versus child, man versus woman, the myth of the lazy and dirty native, the nature of imperialism as a primarily economic or political system – all these are explored and the conclusion is that beyond the economic exploitation and political domination that were the most obvious aspects of colonialism, there were also crucial cultural effects. It is these that have outlived the formal end of colonialism.

Post-colonialism, on the other hand, emerged as a distinct category in the mid 1980s. It basically refers to a set of theories in philosophy and literature that have taken as main subject matter the legacy of colonial rule and are reactions to the cultural legacy of colonialism. Post-colonialism introduced in the academia the question of cultural identity as central in the humanities and social sciences. Theorists deal with the issue of cultural identity in colonized societies, the dilemmas of developing a national identity after colonial rule, the ways in which writers articulate and celebrate identity often reclaiming it from and maintaining strong connections with the colonizers, the ways in which the knowledge of the colonized people has been used to serve the colonizers’ interests and the ways in which the colonizers’ literature has justified colonialism via images of the colonized as inferior people.

There are two broad theoretical and historical frameworks that inform post-colonialism and inspire the motifs of resistance, difference, hybridity, and ambivalence. The first framework evolves from the work of Frantz Fanon and other Third World scholars such as Albert Memmi in the period of anti-colonial nationalism. This Fanonian framework utilized Freudian and other
psychoanalytical perspectives to understand the colonizer/colonized relationship as one of psychic and moral destruction, particularly for the colonized subject. It posited the necessity for outright resistance and rejection and, in particular, the need to recover pre-colonial culture, language, and identity and subvert dominant European characterizations. The second broad framework that has had a pervasive influence on post-colonialism follows the post-structural critique of positivism and essentialism and revolves around the writings of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan. This movement coincides with a general sense of disillusionment in the Third World. Postcolonial writing in this vein is less sanguine about the prospects of recovery and resistance and indeed proceeds from a less totally oppositional standpoint, although resistance is still held up as the overriding political project. Deconstructive techniques and postmodern sensibilities are clearly evident in the work of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Arjun Appadurai, Tejaswini Niranjana, and Kwame Anthony Appiah, and the key motifs of hybridity and ambivalence are employed to understand colonial and postcolonial societies. The notion of the double or divided or fluid identity which is characteristic of the postcolonial writer explains the great attraction which post-structuralism and deconstruction have exerted on post-colonialism.

As far as post-colonial theory proper is concerned this chapter is set to diagnose the ways in which some of the key concepts that it operates with are explored by major figures within the field. Post-colonialism initiates a double movement in the revision of Western modernity that of resisting the power and knowledge of Western universalism and that of finding a space of enunciation in its constitution of an autonomous identity. Each can be viewed as an attempt to retell the postcolonial encounter from a counter hegemonic point of view. In many respects, resistance captures the spirit of the postcolonial challenge to the West, yet the passage from Fanon to the postmodern resistance of a Homi Bhabha or an Achille Mbembe is significantly discordant. Similarly, although an emphasis on difference is seen to unlock postcolonial identity, early nativist moves toward differentiation and particularism are increasingly at odds with Bhabha's reading of cultural difference as splitting and his positioning in favor of ambivalence. However, resistance and difference remain central to the postcolonial project of relocating identity and establishing a private space for postcolonial theory. Thus one can trace the movement from a positivist nativism and essentialism to a more diffuse, postmodern understanding of resistance and cultural difference.
The inscription of ambivalence and hybridity can be seen as the latest stage in postcolonial theory. The two are present in contemporary post-colonialism along with their informing motifs: indeterminacy, heterogeneity, plurality and multiple identities. The key notions of ambivalence and hybridity have enjoyed such a wide currency of use that they have slipped into general discourse as self-evident conditions of post-coloniality. The emphasis on hybridity is heightened in the context of the increased multiculturalism, creolization, and intercontinental traffic of identity and culture in the more globalized space of the late twentieth century. As a condition that is specific to post-coloniality, hybridity is a product of the interaction of cultures that was an inevitable manifestation of colonial rule. Ambivalence has a broader application beyond identity and indeed is seen to predate late modernity and capture an essential feature of imperialism and colonialism. Ambivalence captures the in-between, the equivocal and the uncertain of the postmodern age. Many theorists seem the agree that the resentment toward the West on the part of Third World intellectuals in the nationalist/post-independence period, however hostile, was inevitably ambivalent given that these intellectuals were steeped in Western methodologies and values and hence experienced a love/hate relationship with the West. The colonial experience, therefore, lends itself to a condition of ambivalence. Therefore it becomes clear that ambivalence and hybridity are more in tune with the sensibilities of late modernity or postmodernity than the earlier politics of resistance and difference. The breakdown of clear boundaries between the traditionally perceived three worlds (particularly the boundary between the so-called First and Third Worlds) has given post-colonialism the impetus to view global cultural relations as more fluid, unpredictable, and interconnected. These postmodern conditions have fueled a post-structural approach to questions of identity, culture, power, and resistance, creating in many respects a breach with the older conceptions and understandings of the relations between the first and the Third World.

When Otherness and Sameness are confronted there are two directions within post-colonial theory which account for them and which should be considered: one embracing Marxist anti-imperialist thought and logically stressing Sameness and, the other deriving from post-structuralist and postmodernist tradition stressing Otherness as the principal category of reference.

At the same time the chapter contains an analytical presentation of the line of thought and key concepts promoted by some of the most influential theorists within the field. Thus major
ideas emerging within the works of Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha are brought to the fore.

The last part of the chapter is dedicated to post-colonial literatures. It starts with a general overview which discusses issues related to the name attributed to this body of writings, the stages in their development as well as major themes approached by authors pertaining to this trend. The second section identifies four distinct types of post-colonial literature and expands on the characteristics of each.

The following three chapters contain the text analysis proper. As already mentioned the research is analytical – therefore each writer is studied separately. The chapter entitled “Retrieval of Otherness: Chinua Achebe” starts with an insight into the world of Achebe’s writings. Some details about his personal background as well as about the Igbo community, which is always at the heart of Achebe’s work, are presented. Briefly speaking Achebe was born in Eastern Nigeria in an area first colonized by the British at the end of the nineteenth century. He obtained outstanding results at school and after graduating from university he became involved in journalism and writing. His interests include: the conflict between tradition and modernity, Christian history, African traditional religions, etc. His first novel “Things Fall Apart” is considered the archetypal modern African novel in English with many critics hailing Achebe as the father of African fiction. His deconstruction of Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness” is also to be noted as its impact was so huge that nowadays Conrad criticism is divided into two stages: before and after Achebe.

With respect to the second problem, that of the Igbo people, it is important to be mentioned that the Igbo form one of the principal ethnic groups of Nigeria and they have their own language, the Igbo language, and traditional religion. Achebe argues against the Igbo culture being referred to as a tribal one, suggesting that the Igbos be regarded as a nation. The Igbos largely speak the Igbo language which, though taught at all levels in Eastern Nigerian schools, remains mainly a spoken and colloquial language. English is the official, literary language extensively studied.

Further on, a detailed summary is meant to familiarize the reader with the subject matter of the first novel to be analyzed. “Things Fall Apart” presents the Igbo society at the time of the first major incursions of British colonialism into the Igbo lands at the beginning of the twentieth century. The book is meant to provide the readers with a realistic description of the pre-colonial
past, free of the distortions and stereotypes characteristic to European representations. “Things Fall Apart” can be divided into three segments. The initial section, spanning the first thirteen chapters, is concerned with presenting a vivid picture of the traditional way of life enjoyed by the inhabitants of an Igbo village before the invasion of the British. The second part concerns the protagonist’s exile, following the accidental killing of Ezeudu’s son, during which British colonial administration and Christian missionaries make significant progress in displacing the traditional way of life in Umuofia. In Chapter twenty the protagonist returns to Umuofia, beginning the third and final part of the novel in which he helps to set up a futile and ill-fated attempt to resist this cultural destruction, leading to his death by suicide.

The novel is analyzed in an attempt to find elements that would account for Achebe’s desire to identify and parallel the Igbo people with all the other people in a humanistic discourse of Sameness. Fictional elements which illustrate Achebe’s goal to preserve the individuality and specificity of the Igbo people by means of not succumbing to the European influences and by resisting total assimilation are brought to the fore. Though Achebe does not adopt radical positions the discourse of Otherness has been found to be more articulated and stronger than the one of Sameness. Thus, the following elements have been detected in this respect:

The title of the novel comes from a line in a European poem written by W. B. Yeats and entitled “The Second Coming”. Achebe’s novel, like Yeats’s poem, presents the vision of human history in a series of epochal cycles, “gyres”, but from an African rather than from a European perspective. Therefore, the first of Achebe’s cycles, Igbo tribal life before the coming of the British to Nigeria makes way for the beginning of the twentieth century Europeanization of Africa with all its implied consequences for still another era – the future of post-colonial Africa. By using Yeats’s material to contrast the various periods of Igbo history Achebe is able to accomplish two things: first, through manipulating the Yeatsian theme about the changes inevitable in human history the novel succeeds in showing that the sense of historical decay, continuity and rebirth is not only characteristic of the European tradition but also of the African tradition and second, by exploiting this European literature and historiography, ironically Achebe is able to reverse the white man’s narrow definition of culture and history.

The subchapter about Okonkwo as a tragic hero is meant to clarify the widely debated issue of whether Achebe has or has not dwelled on Greek or Shakespearean tragedy in the construction of his protagonist. Here definitions and characteristics of tragedy as rendered by
Aristotle in his “Poetics” are presented along with three divergent positions adopted by critics. Thus, Angela Smith believes that Okonkwo is not a tragic hero and her main argument is that he does not reveal one crucial tragic flaw. He is not only inflexible but incapable, through pride and fear, of learning new experiences. He never recognizes his own limitations and dies without self-knowledge, a victim of his own inability to mediate or change as his friend Obierika does. A different point of view is expressed by B.C. Njoku. For him Okonkwo is a self-made man, egocentric but honest and upright, for whom foreign importations are threats to traditional Igbo integrity and prevent individuals to respond freely to their world and to themselves. Njoku believes that “Things Fall Apart” satisfies Aristotle’s concept of tragic grandeur. He proves that Okonkwo passes from happiness to misery and that his downfall does not result from vice or bareness but because of a flaw of character – a tragic flaw and last but not least that Okonkwo’s social standing is representative in this respect since he belongs to a distinguished family of the Igbo community. A third position is the one offered by Richard Begam who dwells on Achebe’s own vision of Aristotelian tragedy expressed in various interviews. Okonkwo is a tragic protagonist whose destiny is linked to that of his people and his faults are essentially virtues carried to an extreme. Though he is not perfect he represents some of the best qualities of his culture. My position is that the real answer to theses questions is offered in “No Longer At Ease”, a sequel to “Things Fall Apart”. Okonkwo is indeed a tragic hero but an understanding of his fate should be based on a distinction between Aristotelian or traditional tragedy and ironic or modern tragedy. Okonkwo’s story as viewed from the Igbo perspective presents history in the form of traditional tragedy while Okonkwo’s story viewed from the District Commissioner’s perspective presents history in the form of modern tragedy. For Achebe the tragedy of the past depends on the perspectives of the present. He illustrates the ambiguous relationship which post-colonial writers have with their own past and he envisions his past both as history and tragedy.

The language problematic is one that illustrates Achebe’s complex yet balanced view on the issue of Otherness versus Sameness. Achebe’s decision to write in English along with his motivation for doing so is discussed as well as the difficulties faced by a post-colonial author writing in the language of the colonizers. The position adopted by Ngugi wa Thiong and Lewis Nkosi, on the one hand, and those of E. Obiechina and David Westley, on the other hand, are analyzed. The former are in favor of indigenous languages while the latter acknowledge the tremendous influence of European literary tradition on Africans and recommend the use of
English simultaneously with the use of African languages. In writing “Things Fall Apart” Achebe needed a medium through which to communicate with those who misjudged Igbo culture. Abdul Janmohamed’s distinction between oral and chirographic cultures is presented in order to illustrate that the African writer is faced with the paradox of representing the experience of oral cultures through literate language and forms. In “Things Fall Apart” the writer conveys the flavor of an oral society in his style and narrative organization. We witness a combination of literate and oral techniques. Just as the style represents in writing the syntax and thought patterns of oral cultures, so the narrative operates on two levels: in its novelistic form the story of Okonkwo is unique and historical yet it is told as if it were a well-known myth. The conclusion is that the syncretism of Achebe’s fiction has two important consequences: first, Achebe writes in English in order not to leave the representation of his society at the mercy of racist colonial writers and to get his message across the world and second, he manages to create a content which conveys a longing for a vanished heroic culture while the form transcends the Manichean division of the colonizer and the colonized.

With respect to Otherness the ritualistic killing of Ikemefuna is the first issue brought to attention. Though he does not side with this practice Achebe makes this episode one of the most crucial in the novel in an attempt to create an accurate depiction of a very ordered pre-colonial past. This is an episode that caused a storm of controversy among literary critics. Various points of view along with my own understanding of the situation are rendered. Thus, there are those who consider that Okonkwo committed a dreadful offence by participating in the execution of Ikemefuna, those who say that the killing was an instinctive act, but see it neither as an offence nor as an orchestration of Okonkwo’s decline and those who say that Okonkwo was free to choose not to participate in the execution of Ikemefuna. Arguments are brought to support the opinion that the killing of Ikemefuna is on the one hand the result of capricious fate, Okonkwo’s bad “Chi”, and, on the other hand it could be seen to have deep psychological roots in Okonkwo’s troubled relationship with his father and his overriding ambition to rise above the latter’s failure.

Next, the focus is on Achebe’s mastery in reconciling two worlds; he has to make the Igbo world intelligible after its disappearance, after it has bowed to another episteme. In the presentation of the “ogbanje” ritual one witnesses what Abdul Janmohamed identifies as the “double-consciousness”. This is created more in the reader than in the characters. Achebe’s goal
is to show that Africa has a history just like Europe has a history. He wants to preserve the Otherness of his Africans without insisting too much on it. The reader must at the same time remember what we know and forget what we know – that is suspend disbelief.

Achebe used this novel to prove that the African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans, that societies were not mindless but that they had a philosophy of their own, one of great depth and beauty, that they had dignity. The numerous pages in the novel which provide a depiction of the traditional life and value system of a rigorously ordered and secure African society which will fall apart when it becomes exposed to Western influences are discussed.

The last issue under debate concerns the fact that in the novel Igbo culture is not presented from the inside as vital and autonomous, but from the outside as an object of anthropological curiosity and its collapse is not viewed as an African tragedy but as a European triumph. Achebe uses a biting irony in rendering the narrow perspective of the District Commissioner, his inability to understand the human dimensions of Okonkwo’s fate, his ignorance and political interests. Once more the colonialist discourse is discredited.

The second novel “No Longer at Ease” forms a kind of sequel to “Things Fall Apart” but it is set during a period just prior to Nigerian independence, that is two generations after the one treated in “Things Fall Apart”. The novel traces the long term impact of British colonialism in West Africa and dramatizes social and economic dilemmas still facing modern Africa. The book opens with the trial of Michael Obiajulu Okonkwo, referred to as Obi throughout the novel, who is accused of having accepted a twenty pound bribe. Then it jumps back in time to provide an account of how Obi ended up in that position. Thus, we find out that he had been the recipient of a scholarship to study in England and that, following his return he took a job as a civil servant. Obi had a radical position against corruption and he firmly believed in the young generation. A detail to be noticed is that the protagonist is the son of Nwoye, now Isaac Okonkwo, therefore the grandson of the central character in “Things Fall Apart”. A series of unfortunate events, among which a failed romantic relationship, the death of his mother and poor management of resources, all transform Obi and lead to his accepting bribes in a reluctant acknowledgement that that this is the way of the world he lived in.

A similar strategy has been used here in trying to find elements that would point out the author’s reinforcement of identity with or difference from European epistemology. The first
subchapter makes reference to the fact that the title “No Longer at Ease” comes from a poem by the British American poet T.S. Eliot called “The Journey of the Magi”. Therefore an Anglo American verse is made to serve the purposes of an African novel. Two possible readings of the title are detected: the first is actually an analogy between Obi and the Magi whose quest and revelation has served only to sever their relationship with their own past and the second might refer to the materialist corruption and decline of the protagonist, Obi, who, like the Magus, is caught between two worlds. Next, the way in which tragedy, a European genre, applies to Obi’s destiny is discussed. However it is a modern, ironic tragedy like the one that he himself so passionately admires. My conclusion is that “No Longer At Ease” indicates that Okonkwo’s tragedy has not reached its end, that the tragic destiny it implies continues to be lived by the next generations.

With respect to Otherness the following aspects have been analyzed:

This novel traces the building of a nation and Obi’s course in life as he fails to fulfill his own vision of personal and governmental integrity. Achebe presents us a number of forces allied against the construction of a future strong nation. By external conflict I refer to the fact that the novel explores the decadence of modern urban environment which is contrasted with the idea of rural piety and stability. The subchapter provides an analysis of various instances which point to this opposition and renders Achebe’s position of siding with tradition and even manifesting a certain nostalgia for the past. The protagonist ultimately falls not because he is alienated from society but because his character is ossified around certain traditional values. Colonialism inevitably produces in the colonized society a period of chaos during which old values no longer apply and the new ones have not yet been found. The conclusion is that the novel can be seen as product between the desire to retain traditional values and the recognition that change and assimilation are absolutely necessary for survival.

The second conflict, that is the internal one, is largely a result of the fact that the protagonist has been the beneficiary of education in the Western world. Thus, the ties he had with traditional society have been severed and on his return he is hopelessly caught between two worlds. I consider that we cannot blame Obi’s moral decline on his contact with Western cultures or on the materialism and decadence of the age. This subchapter puts forward the idea that Obi is an idealist, a modern rebel who searches mature autonomy in his existence but who is guilty of two things: first, he is not true to his own people rebelling against tradition and second, he is not
true to his new social status as an educated man whose character should be irreproachable. One finds in him a mixture of three cultures none of which has been properly assimilated. My conclusion is that in Achebe’s vision European education changes young Africans to the point where they reject tradition and want to embrace the new in a search for their own individuality. However, European education itself is not criticized by the writer, rather he says that young Africans need to be thoroughly prepared before the contact with the Western world and by preparation one should understand the human dimension which needs to be fully shaped and rightfully oriented.

The language problematic is discussed in terms of the hero being torn between two cultures, the European and the African, and the writer’s preference for the latter. The last subchapter discusses Clara’s status as an “osu” as well as Obi’s and society’s reaction to her condition. It is an illustration of the characteristics of the traditional Igbo culture at odds with the new world. This fact serves to explore further Obi’s ambivalence between the claims of modern society and the claims of tradition. Society puts a strong pressure on Obi as he is once again caught between the desire to attain personal freedom and the duty to obey conventions. The conclusion is that despite Christianity, British rule and modernity, tradition is still deeply rooted within Igbo society. The cultural conflict becomes multidimensional and three worlds influence Obi while he lacks the moral strength to emerge unscathed.

The last novel under discussion “Anthills of the Savannah” marks a change in Achebe’s fiction both in point of content and in point of form. The book addresses many political issues and explores the dangers and difficulties faced by post-colonial societies in the newly independent nation states from Africa. The action is set in an imaginary African state, called Kangan, which is ruled by a dictator, Sam or His Excellency, with military training at Sandhurst academy. The main problem discussed is the way in which a nation is run, the way this affects the majority of the people- including those in power – the way in which statesmen, leaders and politicians are either complicit with or resistant to undemocratic and dictatorial administration of the nation. Christopher Oriko and Ikem Osodi, formerly Sam’s colleagues, who try to speak against the government, suffer dreadful consequences as we finally witness Sam being overthrown and a new government installed.

An entire subchapter is dedicated to the gender problematic because in “Anthills of the Savannah” Achebe creates for the first time a main character who is a woman and he goes even
further and makes her an entirely independent person who does not have to rely on relationships with men in order to survive. Criticism is divergent in this respect; however, the main positions adopted along with my own are presented. The subchapter is an illustration of the fact that Beatrice Okoh is a very strong person, capable of empathizing with the others and of helping them find the right path. In this respect I analyze her background, British education, her relationship with Chris and friendship with Ikem, the support she gives to Elewa and her symbolical role as priestess of Idemili.

With respect to Otherness the following aspects have been analyzed:

The language problematic as in this novel Achebe manages to use the language not only as a marker of the individuality of the Africans but also as a class marker. The common people of Kangan speak Pidgin English while the elite speak Standard English. The fact that the culture and language of ordinary people form part of the public discourse of the society as a whole and set it apart from Europeans is stressed.

Another issue debated is the fact that all of the four main characters have studied and spent a significant amount of time in Britain and the novel looks at how these people position themselves in relation to the common citizens of Kangan. The question is how the British educated elite can and should combine forces with the masses in order to create a just and fair society. In this subchapter the way in which each of the main characters was influenced by exposure to Western culture is analyzed. This is because one of the main themes of the novel is the concern with leadership. The emergent idea is that besides education, which is definitely a step further, the elite and the leaders must reconnect themselves with the ordinary people and stop living up there unaware of the reality of the nation. Ikem manages to do this and so does Chris even if only in the end. But the carrier of the hope is Beatrice. The naming ceremony from her apartment seems to be an indication of the fact that if the right forces come together and find the power to direct national policy and the political culture of the people then a better future may lie ahead.

Last but not least the past is brought to attention since dignifying the past and restoring African self-confidence are among the first steps to be taken by post-colonial independent nation states. This novel tries to activate the values of the past presented in the previous novels with the purpose of solving the problems of contemporary post-colonial society. This subchapter looks for fictional elements which illustrate that the journey towards the future had to visit the past. It
starts from Achebe’s words that “it is the story that conveys all our gains, all our failures, all we hold dear and all we condemn”. Ikem’s “Hymn to the Sun” and his speech at the University of Bassa are significant as a lesson that teaches us to value the past and appreciate the wisdom of the ancestors. Beatrice’s reconnection with traditions and the mythical past is also explored. The conclusion is that in the end Beatrice teaches us the most. Metaphorically speaking she is the anthill that survives because she realizes that the role of stories, the role of the past is not only to mean something but also to do something. In the naming ceremony she brings together past and present and adapts the ancient ritual to the contemporary world creating a new hybrid with which to greet the future.

“Transcendence of Otherness: Rohinton Mistry” is a chapter that starts with some basic details about Rohinton Mistry’s personal background which are considered essential to an accurate understanding of his work. He is an Indian born writer belonging to the Parsi community who spent the first twenty-three years of his life in Bombay, his native city, where he graduated from university with a B. Sc. despite his interest in literature and arts. In Canada, he studied English and Philosophy at the University of Toronto and it was there that he started his career as a writer with short stories that were awarded prestigious prizes. The other works that followed – a collection of short stories and the subsequent novels – were very well received by literary criticism and awarded numerous distinctions. Mistry’s work centers on the culture and life of the Prasi community but above all it is governed by a hybridity that operates at multiple levels.

The chapter continues with a brief history of the Parsi community in India. Parsis are descendants of Persian Zoroastrians, who left Iran after its conquest by Muslim Arab invaders some 1,000 years ago, and immigrated to the North Western Indian region of Gujarat. The community flourished especially after the beginning of European colonization and played an important role as mediators between European colonizers and Indians. They became India’s most urbanized and prosperous community but unfortunately experienced a decline in the post-colonial era for reasons which are easy to understand – they did not actively support the anti-colonial struggle and they continued to be loyal to British colonial ideals. Nowadays the community continues to maintain its ethnic identity – they are Indians in terms of national affiliation, language and history but, at the same time, they maintain their own distinct customs and religious practices. The situation of the Parsis could be considered very illustrative of the
much talked about hybridity as identified by cultural theorist Homi Bhabha – himself a Parsi. He describes colonial identity marked by ambivalence, involving a process of both identification with the colonial Other and a disavowal of him.

Since Mistry’s work abounds in references to the ancient Zoroastrian faith an entire section of this chapter is dedicated to its presentation. Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion founded by the priest and prophet Zarathustra at some time around the fifth or sixth century B.C. The dualistic nature of the religion presupposes that God’s creation – truth, order and rightfulness – is the antithesis of falsehood, disorder and chaos. Every form of ascetism is rejected and active participation in the support of the good is expected from human beings. Not to assist the power of good in one’s everyday life means supporting the power of evil. The choice is encapsulated in the Zoroastrian ethical code which requires from adepts “good thoughts, good words, good deeds”.

Before the analysis proper of the novels motivations for Mistry’s decision to write about India despite the fact that he is a Canadian resident are presented. The subchapter dedicated to Mistry’s first novel “Such a Long Journey” starts with a plot summary meant to familiarize the reader with the basic content of the book. Mistry’s novel is based in Bombay, India in the year 1971, its main focus being the lives and hardships of members of the Parsi community intermingled with the social and political realities of the time. The protagonist, Gustad Noble, a hard-working clerk and devoted family man is unwillingly thrown into the corrupt and brutal world of Indian politics and the novel traces his attempt to face both his inner fears and the threats of the outside world. The novel is full of conclusions and fulfillment as Mistry tries to illustrate the continuing, never-ending, always turning hand of time.

Further on, the analysis of the novel accounts for the fact that it can be read in two ways. On the one hand, there is Mistry’s concern with Otherness as community Otherness and the novel cannot be understood unless the cultural, historical and religious specific characteristics of the Parsi community are considered. On the other hand, Mistry goes one step further and makes references to the humanist tradition pleading for communication and intercultural understanding in a very articulated discourse of Sameness. As he himself has put it, sometimes “the universalities of the story are sufficient”.

With respect to community Otherness, history is one of the most important factors which give Parsis a sense of uniqueness and, to a significant extent “Such a Long Journey” is
concerned with Parsi history and politics as modes of accurately understanding Parsi identity. The novel presents a fictionalized version of a historical event involving a Parsi. In an attempt to preserve the cultural memory of the Parsi community and help them construct their identity against the hegemonic discourse of post-colonial Hindu majority, Mistry presents history from a different perspective – it is seen through the eyes of a Parsi directly involved in the events.

Religion as a marker of cultural identity is brought to the fore as the novel abounds in details regarding the Zoroastrian faith and the way the nature and demands of the religion impinge upon the protagonist’s acts. Language is another instance of the text’s inscription of cultural Otherness. In this subchapter reference is made to Parsi anglophilia and threats against it which equate with threats against the community’s identity as well. One major factor presented in the novel is the project initiated by the newly independent Indian administration to construct a postcolonial identity free of all foreign influences. A first step is giving up British names of streets, of buildings, of everything. Another aspect discussed is the slippery character of language and the misinterpretation of reality precisely because of this.

Further on the influence that artificial barriers such as the compound wall and the blackout paper have upon the protagonist of the novel as well as upon the other characters is explored. The compound wall keeps the outside world at a distance both literally -it provides the residents of the building with isolation from the turmoil of the city - and metaphorically – the entire building is inhabited by representatives of the Parsi community. However, the demolition of the wall by the municipality signals the fact that the protection it provided was only an illusion and the optimistic ending of the novel points to the positive side of its destruction. From now on the Parsis living inside will have to face the outside world and take a stand. Active engagement is definitely more difficult but always more rewarding. The blackout paper put up by Gustad ten years ago is another boundary which signals his failure to act and desire to avoid the outside world by concentrating on the past. Gustad is mistaken in trying to preserve the things of the past as a shield against change which is inevitable in human existence. Actually the effect of the blackout paper is the same as that of the compound wall – it prevents active engagement in the service of the good and foregrounds isolation and passivity.

The chapter continues with an analysis of Mistry’s preoccupation with universal human values, a preoccupation which transcends the traditional postcolonial concern with Otherness.
The collapse of cultural barriers is especially evident in the result of Gustad’s decision to ask the pavement artist to paint on the compound wall images of Gods and Saints representative of all religions practiced in India. The paintings turn the wall from a profane place used as a public latrine into a sacred one used for worship. Thus, the traditional post-colonial concern with religion as a marker of cultural Otherness is supplemented by a functionalist reading of religion as essential in helping us discover the meaning of our existence. The role of communication is also discussed and the conclusion is that it is Gustad’s understanding and assimilation of the values and teachings of life as well as the profound change he undergoes that bring about the reconciliation with his son. It is not Miss Kutpitia’s spells but his metamorphosis from an isolated and full of mistrust human being into an open-minded and all-encompassing one.

Next, the analogy between human existence and a long journey or life as a journey is brought to the fore. The relationship that could be established between the epigraph of the novel taken from T. S. Eliot’s poem “The Journey of the Magi” and the protagonists’ quest is presented. The conclusion is that the message of both Mistry’s novel and that of Eliot’s poem is that not the achievement of a goal is really important but the way humans as travelers through life act in the course of this journey. Reference is made to the figure of the pavement artist who is illustrative of this theme. The artist lives and works in a changeable world because in art as in life permanence is an illusion. He embodies the attitude of the traveler on the journey of life. This attitude gives him the strength to fight the hardships of life by adapting to its basic characteristic – mutability. When he changes his attitude and becomes like Gustad he suffers. However, the end of the novel sees Gustad understanding that life, just like a journey, is nothing but a series of changes and that loss is part of human experience through time.

The subchapter on human estrangement explores Gustad’s relationships with his friends and the impact that these relationships had on his pessimistic outlook of life. In this Gustad is not only a representative of the Parsi community but a representative of humans in general. Malcolm Saldanha disappoints him but this is only because he fails to understand that the private and the public spheres are distinct components of our existence. The same thing happens with Jimmy Bilimoria and Sohrab who were both family to him. Once again he is mistaken and refuses to see the complexity of each situation. Dinshawji’s and Tehmul’s deaths stand for the end of humor and innocence. All these events lead to Gustad’s strong desire to alienate himself from society and find a nostalgic retreat in an ideal past.
“A Fine Balance” is Mistry’s second novel set in an unknown city that the reader can easily guess is Bombay. It is a historical novel concentrating on the terror experienced by people during the State of Emergency of 1975-1977. Here, Mistry expands his area of interest moving beyond Parsi life to embrace the fate of the wider Indian nation. The novel starts with the encounter of the four protagonists: Dina Dalal – a middle-aged Parsi widow; Maneck Kohlah – an eighteen-year-old Parsi college student from the North to whom Dina rents her bedroom in order to supplement her income and Ishvar and Omprakash Darji – middle-aged uncle and teenage nephew, who are Hindu tailors coming to work for Dina. The following chapters are flashbacks presenting the lives of the main characters up to the present moment. Chapter 6 catches up to the point where the novel began. From now on the reader learns of the abuses suffered by people during the Emergency, of the way people of different religious background can care for each other, of the huge gap existing between the rich and the poor and of the corruption that has spread all over the country contaminating all social classes, religions, and ethnicities.

The same strategy as in the case of the first novel is adopted in an attempt to find elements that account for Mistry’s signaling the Otherness of his own community as well as that of the whole post-colonial Indian society. Then those elements which point to the fact that the novel can be understood without making any reference to cultural Otherness are investigated. Mistry’s novel is also a plea for intercultural communication and human solidarity as ways of constructing an identity and as remedies against a stark reality.

The first two sections demonstrate how historical events and religious prejudices can have destructive consequences on people. The book focuses on two historical events: The Partition coupled with Indian Independence of 1947 and the State of Emergency of 1975-1977. The former leaves Maneck’s father without a large part of the family estate and confronts Ishvar and Narayan with violent conflicts between Hindus and Muslims while the latter has a drastic impact on many characters in the novel, especially Ishvar and Om. They are homeless and horribly mutilated physically as a result of the cruelties of Indira Gandhi’s regime.

Then the implications of the Hindu caste system and of the way it is responsible for the ruination of many destinies are discussed. This section is mainly concerned with Ishvar and Om and the tragic fate of their family. They belong to the Chamaar caste of tanners and leather workers, one of the lowest possible and one which is considered outside the four varnas –
therefore its members are deemed untouchable. The drastic effect that this position within the social system has on people is explored. Their blight is obvious at several levels: economic, social and psychological. The extraordinary degree to which this mentality is rooted within Hindu society is to be noted along with the fact that constitutional rights are merely theoretical in most areas of the country.

In support of a humanistic discourse of Sameness the chapter dwells first on the theme of loss and tries to prove that characters experience the uselessness and meaninglessness of existence due to situations which have nothing to do whatsoever with post-colonial Indian specificities. The erosion and dissatisfaction in Maneck’s and Dina’s lives are analyzed here. In Maneck’s case the problematic relationship he has with his father is one of the sources of loss because that translates in him losing the ties with his home which is an important component of an individual’s identity. The loss of home could be equated with a loss of identity and a man without identity is a confused man with no purpose in life. The way in which Mistry examines the condition of the migrant which entails a loss of home in different terms is also investigated. In Dina Dalal’s case the losses from her past influence her behavior as an adult. As a child she loses her father to illness and as a young woman she loses her beloved husband in a traffic accident. The former event triggers an obsession with independence while the latter a fear of loneliness – two impulses which are, ironically, in direct conflict with each other.

The next section focuses on the role of storytelling. The quilt that Dina makes could be considered a leitmotif of the novel and a metaphor for the construction of identity by means of storytelling. The different patches that it is made of illustrate the individual identity which is made out of various elements. The result of identity construction is understood in most cases as a homogenous whole made of heterogeneous parts. Mistry suggests that the best way of creating a strong identity is by means of storytelling. A character who particularly stresses the importance of storytelling is Vasantrao Valmik. He understands the real power of stories which have a twofold purpose: They help us remember facts but also change facts, present our own version of things. Even official history can be subverted by the little stories of apparently insignificant individuals. Valmik’s reasoning is much like that of the post-colonial writer who tells the stories of the colonized in order to give them an identity of their own.

An entire section is dedicated to concrete examples illustrating the need to reach for the others and communicate, a need which transcends all cultural barriers and is essential in
endowing our existence with a purpose. This need is emphasized all through the novel and even the most sinister of characters display a slight sense of caring and compassion towards the other human beings. Examples in this respect are presented but the largest part of this section is constituted by an analysis of the most significant enacting of this – the unconventional developing family from Dina’s apartment made out of the four protagonists of the novel. In the context of the relationship between the two Parsis and the two Hindus cultural difference is subverted and proved to be an artificial construct rather than a relevant barrier with respect to social contacts. The Other is only the one who is perceived to be an Other. The communication between protagonists, the sharing of experiences, the symbols and gestures are further analyzed here.

The next subchapter is meant to explore the idea of balance which is extremely important for the understanding of the novel. Throughout their trials and tribulations, Mistry’s characters hope that the good will defeat the bad or, at the very least, there will be a harmony of good and bad. Consequently, many of the novel’s characters spend a great deal of time evaluating and considering the idea of justice and fairness. They also spend a great deal of time suffering the imbalance of justice and fairness in their lives. Those who manage to maintain the ‘fine balance’ between the exploiter and exploited are the victorious ones who manage to survive, even in much reduced forms. The theme of balance is articulated most effectively by the philosopher of the novel – Vasantrao Valmik. “Sometimes you have to use your failures as stepping stones to success. You have to maintain a fine balance between hope and despair.” Balance is in fact acceptance but not in the sense that people have to suffer passively all that fate has prepared for them. Balance entails an effort – people have to draw their energy from sources of hope instead of sinking into despair. The message of the novel is that the three survivors – Dina, Ishvar and Om – act according to Valmik’s advice. Mistry celebrates the universality of their efforts and addresses the universality of our own human condition by encouraging a continuous fight against all obstacles that we may come across.

The last section concentrates on Mistry’s style and highlights points of view expressed by various literary critics. Most seem to agree that Mistry has written a traditional realist book in a Dickensian manner. However the opinion of those who argue that the novel is made of a multitude of narrative styles and it sometimes moves away from realism into the realm of pure symbolism is not dismissed either. Positions adopted by critics within various reviews which
envisage Mistry’s entire work not just the novel in question are presented. The conclusion is that Mistry’s writing is basically about fiction-making and the best term to encompass its preoccupation would be post-colonial meta-realism. Examples of the technique of foreshadowing and of the modernist inheritance which emerges in quotations from Yeats’ poem “The Second Coming” are provided. The poem presents Yeats’ view about history and political struggle; it is about the end of civilization and Valmik uses it to diagnose the state of post-colonial Indian society. The section also dwells on the fact that Mistry explores the paradox of the concepts of “order” and “chaos” in a manner which is reminiscent of Chinua Achebe.

The last novel investigated is “Family Matters”, Mistry’s most recent work. It is a beautifully written traditional novel set in the mid nineties Mumbai tracing the lives of three generations in a Parsi family. Apart from charting the effects of religious bigotry and rigid traditionalism, the novel; scrutinizes other ills of post-colonial Indian society chief among which the unending corruption of government and politicians. Nariman Vakeel, a retired professor of English literature, lives in his seven room apartment and is reluctantly taken care of by his two stepchildren, Coomy and Jal. When he becomes bed-bound as a result of breaking his leg, the two find their task unbearable and plot to transfer him into Roxana Chenoy’s overcrowded flat. Their half sister and Nariman’s biological daughter, Roxana is a married woman mother of two young boys. Nariman’s presence in their flat will test the family members’ notion of love and duty and remake their sense of responsibility towards one another. However, Coomy’s plans to keep Nariman away lead to her accidental death and the subsequent movement of Roxana’s family in Nariman’s spacious flat. In the Epilogue we learn of Nariman’s death and of the fact that the Chenoys are doing well from a financial point of view but, sadly, a misperceived essentialism has penetrated the spiritual side of certain members of the family.

Within the next sections the text is analyzed in a manner similar to the previous two, namely, it is first demonstrated that the novel is deeply anchored in postcolonial studies and cannot be understood without a recourse to postcolonial Indian specificities; then, fictional elements which would account for the universality of the story are brought to attention.

The former category includes Mistry’s preoccupation with history and the toll it takes on the lives of ordinary people. To begin with a few elements from Indian history against which the action of the novel takes place are presented. Further on the section provides concrete examples of how the lives of ordinary people are affected by the rules established by those in power.
Actually the political subtext of the novel is the growth of the fundamentalist Shiv Sena ideology and its repercussions on the life of the ordinary, innocent citizens. The rise of right wing politics in India led to a moment of serious crisis for all non-Hindu Indians and the novel tries to diagnose their anxieties, feelings of insecurity and apprehension.

The first subchapter concerned with the analysis of universal, humanist values focuses on the issue of moral ambiguity. Throughout the novel we witness the characters trying to live their lives independently of the external events but sadly, the public and the private sphere cannot be separated and corruption ends up penetrating even the Parsi community one of the most respected for their honesty. The characters’ corruption is linked with the social and political corruption characteristic of modern Bombay. Sometimes the reasons behind their actions are most honest and perfectly justified. The section dwells on examples which illustrate the fragmentation of ideals in practice and the overlapping and frequently contradictory obligations of duty that people have towards family, community, religion and society. We discover that the members of the Parsi community are nostalgic in their remembering of their glorious past and find it difficult to come to terms with their marginal status in post colonial Indian society. Most of them are torn between the desire to escape the community boundaries and the urge to follow the traditional path, an option which is not without traps as it ironically resembles the course of action adopted by the extremist Shiv Sena, whom they so much despise.

An entire section is dedicated to cultural difference as in this novel, it is treated in a way very different from the previous works. Whereas in the first novel cultural difference represented a source from which people could extract the purpose of their existence, in the next novels the same concept is viewed more critically culminating with the negative outlook on cultural difference expressed in this last novel. Partaking Homi Bhabha’s idea that colonial identity is marked by ambivalence and that it involves a process of both identification with the colonial Other and a disavowal of him, Mistry writes in favor of a hybrid identity and pleads for tolerance and intercultural understanding. The issue of boundaries is explored in “Family Matters” and the essential question is whether these are useful or detrimental in people’s attempt to find the purpose of their existence. If these boundaries are too numerous, they may prevent solidarity and communication and influence in a negative way the formation of cultural identity. This section analyzes the involution of the main character Yezad, his metamorphosis from a tolerant, open-minded person into an essentialist religious fundamentalist. This character is in strong contrast
with his employer Mr. Kapur who seems to be the epitome of humanistic values. Religion becomes for Yezad a marker of individuality, a marker of the Otherness of the Parsi community which is to be cherished and preserved. The conclusion is that Mistry is highly critical of communities who opt for lack of communication and self-centeredness because these strategies inevitably lead to spiritual and cultural degeneration. Mistry cherishes the importance of religion and tradition as markers of identity but is critical of them as markers of essentialism and isolation.

The next section starts from Edward Said’s affirmation that a key aspect of modernism resides in the movement from filiation to affiliation and is set to prove that in most of his works Mistry seems to suggest that affiliations are determined by and reflect filial values. As the double meaning of the title suggests, family is important both as the site of basic links – filiation and, as the place of tension an unsettled problems. Affiliations, too, are explored here and oddly enough it is these which prove to be stronger and more emblematic of the family ideal. The conclusion is that Mistry depicts two kinds of family – one which is a matter of birth and blood ties and one, which is by extension, the wider family of human kind, which is a matter of tolerance and understanding. Naturally, he favors the latter.

Finally an entire section is dedicated to the role of storytelling viewed as a creative way of improving one’s knowledge and opening new horizons. Jehangir’s books of stories are discussed here along with Nariman’s stories from Parsi folklore and the stories of those who suffered such as the survivors of the Partition and Husain, the Muslim peon. The role of the web of stories which make up the novel is to homogenize Otherness and account for universal human values. In Mr. Kapur’s words: “...no matter where you go in the world, there is only one important story: of youth and loss, and yearning for redemption. So we tell the same story, over and over. Just the details are different.”

The work of the last writer under investigation is analyzed in the chapter entitled “Dissolution of Otherness: Diran Adebayo” which observes the same structure as the previous two. Thus it starts with some details about Diran Adebayo’s background as they are vital to an accurate understanding of his novel. Our personal background always influences our perceptions and self-constructed images of the world. Adebayo was born in London to parents of Nigerian descent and has gained critical acclaim as a writer with the publication of his first novel “Some Kind of Black” in 1996. The book won numerous awards and has been reprinted several times
being now a “modern classic”. To a certain extent it is an autobiographical novel with the main protagonist – Dele – moving back and forth between London and Oxford University where he is a student. The book’s central concern is with identity and it reveals a rejection of ethnic or cultural purity. It is also to be noted that Adebayo has published one more novel in 2000 “My Once Upon A Time” and a third one is scheduled for publication in 2009. He is the epitomy of the engaged writer with activities in the field of journalism, television and editing books.

The chapter continues with a brief presentation of the history of the Black British community in Britain and a clarification of the term “Black British”, which can be used in two ways: in an inclusive sense to refer to all “non-white British” and in a restrictive sense to refer to British people of African or Caribbean descent. The history of black people in Britain dates back to Roman times and it continued throughout the centuries up to the contemporary period. However, the largest influx of black people occurred in the period after the Second World War and they mainly came from the West Indies. Actually the term “Black British” came into use when the second generation were born to these post-war immigrants. Today blacks account for 13% of London’s population; they have representatives in Parliament but still have to fight high unemployment rates and poverty.

The next subchapter is dedicated to an overview of contemporary Black British culture as it will prove extremely helpful to an analysis and appropriate understanding of the issues raised in the novel. The different stages in the crystallization of an autonomous Black British culture are taken into account. The presentation starts with the 1970s, a period when ‘black’ as a distinct category began to establish itself in Britain. The conscious orchestration of identity around blackness at this time was primarily concerned with the need to express resistance and protest against a white national British culture, hence the politicization of black consciousness in the 1970s. The cultural and political projects of this decade led to a shift in terms of identification and representation and, by the 1980s, the black presence in Britain turned into the black dimension of Britain. At this point the important work initiated by Stuart Hall at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies of Birmingham is to be noted. Cultural production began to reflect the need to articulate multiple facets of identity. There was an increasing need to acknowledge multiple perspectives and the pluralisation of cultural forms and positions within Black British culture. Stuart Hall’s writings throughout the 1980s brought to the fore the experiences of black people in Britain as a distinctly British or English experience. The
beginning of the 1990s marked an increasing fragmentation within Black British culture and there was a strong sense that differences from the black community were more important and enabling to articulations of identity and creative works. Nowadays, as difference becomes more marketable and more nuanced, the notion of black as an identificatory category demands constant redefinition. The twenty-first century moves towards a recognition of the way in which cultural identities are formed through complex patterns of Otherness and Sameness in the context of a nation in which definitions of nationality are more mobile and multiple cross-cultural and intercultural interactions are permanently challenging and redefining the established concepts of cultural identity.

The analysis proper of Adebayo’s novel “Some Kind of Black” starts with a detailed plot summary which is meant to familiarize the reader with the book’s subject matter and prepare the ground for an in-depth analysis. The novel is based in London and Oxford in the early nineties and it traces a difficult year in the life of the protagonist, Dele. To a certain extent it is an autobiographical novel with the hero’s struggle to find his own self mirroring the author’s own search of his true nature as a young man. Thus, in the first chapters one witnesses Dele’s constant moving back and forth between London and Oxford, where he is a student. The deep bond he has with his younger sister Dapo, his attempt to find a girlfriend, his problematic relationship with his father – all these are detailed in the first part of the novel. Then things take a different turn after the police arrest and Dapo going into a coma. As a young Oxford graduate Dele has to Face the wider outside world and learn to protect himself and his family against all those who try to take advantage of their situation.

The following subchapters contain an analysis of the novel which accounts for the fact that it can be read and interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, there is Adebayo’s attempt to pinpoint the specific cultural differences which set his hero apart from other London youths. On the other hand, the novel could be read as a young man’s journey of self-discovery, one which may have a universal character reflecting the eternal human search for constructing a genuine identity within a world fraught with contradictions. The main argument is that the protagonist’s identity is constructed between these markers of Otherness and Sameness.

Dele’s Otherness is signaled by his Nigerian descent and the fact that he is part of the black London scene. The former means that he has to meet both the expectations of an authoritarian father and the ones of contemporary British society. The fact that his father’s
attitude is emblematic of the “diasporic experience” as diagnosed by Stuart Hall is signaled. Baba Dele is the “familiar stranger” part of two worlds feeling that he does not belong and does not fit completely in either. Adebayo’s view is an optimistic one, though, as the father and son reconciliation does take place. The assumption put forward is that, though one’s origin will always have a distinct role to play in one’s overall identity, a complex Self has a lot to do with the influences from the environment that we inhabit. With respect the other problem – that of Dele being part of black London – Adebayo insists on the fragmentation that characterizes the black community in urban London and how this may impinge upon the construction of the identity of black subjects.

In the first subchapter on Sameness there is an attempt to find fictional elements which point to the fact that the portrayal of the black youth as overwhelmed by cultural doubt, dislocation and inauthenticity has very little to do with individual young black men. Adebayo demonstrates a real feel of urban life and remarkable skill in capturing the community as it is – that is characterized by a high degree of heterogeneity. Through Dele the author explores the desires, pleasures and pain of living in modern British society, and how young black British youths refuse to engage in any simplistic way with the dominant images about them. The numerous characters in the novel who represent a clear break with the characteristics of black youth as perceived by the white community are brought to attention. Similarly, the fact that the racial conflict is secondary to the larger human conflict which brings to the fore the good and bad parts in every individual is also underlined.

Next, the way in which the protagonist’s identity is constructed as he unwarily embarks on a journey of self-discovery is emphasized. Adebayo’s fictional perspective illustrates Stuart Hall’s assumption that “cultural identity is not fixed, it’s always hybrid”. “Some Kind of Black” is not intent on imposing an authentic, clear-cut identity of the hero as a member of the Black British community but, more likely, on demonstrating that a person’s cultural identity is made up of several ingredients, heterogeneous bits which come together to make a new whole. The various ‘selves’ are not isolated but in permanent dialogue with each other. Dele is part of many worlds which have to be reconciled and which contribute to the formation of his genuine ‘Self’. A crucial experience which contributes to Dele’s finding his real identity is represented by his relationship with Andria, his girlfriend. The two seem to have built an immense bond and their relationship is anything but vulnerable in itself but, unfortunately, there is this pressure from
outside that kills it. Paradoxically, the bitterest judgment comes from the black population. Details of Dele’s reasoning behind the decision to break up with Andria are highlighted. The conclusion is that humans cannot live in isolation and society impinges upon us to an extent greater than that we are aware of. However, the optimistic tone of the novel is to be noted as it is a pause that Dele wants not a definitive break-up. This leaves us with the feeling that young black people are genuinely concerned with the construction of new cultural alternatives in which identity is created and re-created as part of an ongoing and dynamic process.

The last part of the discussion about the novel, demonstrates that despite the fact that Dele moves back and forth between various worlds, he is without doubt a typical Londoner who, like all the other inhabitants of the city, has been subject to many influences as a result of living in a multicultural space. The book is in accordance with what cultural theorist Stuart Hall emphasizes when he points out that there is nowadays in Britain a culture that is distinctly Black and British at the same time. Black people understand that they can forge their own way of being British. Two distinctions are essential whenever one talks about the existence of a protagonist who is both black and British. The first one is the one between race and class. Fictional elements which pinpoint the fact that class issues are really important in Britain and that barriers of class are certainly higher than those of race are brought to attention. The second distinction is the one between race and culture. “Some Kind of Black” focuses its attention on the eclectic, diverse and polycultural character of London’s society. The multicultural character in Dele’s upbringing has made its mark on his entire personality. Adebayo’s view of culture as “a fluid, ongoing process” and Dele’s understanding that it is not what color you have to be to be British but, rather, who has British or Western ways and who does not are discussed. It is argued that all through the novel Dele proves that he is authentically British not authentically black. The novel ultimately points out that despite the progress that has been made in this direction, still, there are people who fail to grasp the British dimension of their existence and analyze matters exclusively with respect to race.

The final chapter presents the conclusions of the present study in an analytical manner and ends with a few personal observations on the contemporary challenges of identity which have taken shape as a result of this research.

For Chinua Achebe Otherness translates mainly as cultural Otherness. His contention is that the ideological mission of African writing is to retrieve the value and dignity of a past
insulted by European representation, and to counter the eternal truths and universalities of Western thought. For formerly colonized cultures, post-colonial now, traumatized by colonialism, a fiction that recuperates Africa’s autonomous resources and reconstitutes the fragmented colonial subjects makes an active contribution to the collective aspiration of regaining a sense of direction and identity. Achebe’s remembrance does not encourage an unrecoverable past, but merely aims at challenging the colonial representation. He wants to reinvent national identity as a self-willed return to pre-colonial usable pasts and literary traditions. He advocates a conscious rejection of an imposed European identity. In his case Otherness and Sameness are written as mutually exclusive entities. While he admits to the fact that Africans benefited to a certain extent from European knowledge and European ideology of progress he points to the fact that the colonized Africans were forced to renounce their previous identities and narratives in order to enter an imperial future in which they were still marginal. The new subjects of empire were thus located at an epistemological juncture: their past identities and narratives could not disappear entirely, nor could they remain central to their lives – hence Achebe’s claim that colonialism barely scratched the surface of African cultures but radically altered their socio-economic institutions. Achebe’s believes that the recovery of a different, traditional self-identity is a crucial step towards self-respect and empowerment, that by emphasizing what is distinctly African a space for a more critical and independent response to European domination can be established.

For him an authentic African /Nigerian identity must incorporate both the European colonial heritage and the African pre-colonial traditions and culture. In this respect he is a precursor of contemporary theories of identity. In his reinterpretation of post-colonial Africa Achebe is among the first to argue in favor of the recognition of identity as a container of multiple influences. This view of the unfolding identity as a song of Self and Other, a multitude of grains making up the African post-colonial experience, prefigures recent post-modern theorizing of identity as ambivalent and hybrid.

Rohinton Mistry’s conceptualization of identity is located somewhere between Achebe and Adebayo. Mistry’s fiction offers the satisfactions of recognition to both those familiar with the machinations and realities of postcolonial Indian politics and the position of the Parsis as a vulnerable minority and, to general readers who may know little about the background but who can identify with the characters, their experiences and life choices. There is a blend of
universality and cultural and contextual specificity that gives Mistry’s texts their uniqueness and seems to ensure their longevity too. Mistry steps into the post-ethnic paradigm and chooses to address questions horizontally across cultures, while countering stereotypes. However the ethnic identity impacts upon Mistry’s style complicating its inherent hybridity. Nevertheless, in spite of an overt presentation of ethnic and religious traditions few of Mistry’s protagonists are prisoners of their ethnicities or religion. Most of them try to move beyond these constructs, to wider spaces which are not over-determined by ethnic groups or hegemonic groups in post-colonial India. One could view Mistry’s texts as narrow and dealing with Parsi experience alone but at a closer look they should be read as having been written in those in-between spaces, the Derridean interstices, through which they cross the borders between ethnicity and transnationality. The explicit demand for hybridity can be detected in all his novels.

At the same time, the concern with history that informs all his novels is evidence of the fact that Mistry writes a postcolonial literature that has something to say about the past. His novels display a deconstruction of history which is supplemented by the construction of new stories – own versions of the truth, challenges to official history and the politicians’ truths.

It is also very important for the reader to understand that apart from the cultural exchange Mistry promotes an exchange between human beings that focuses not only on cultural difference but also on intercultural Sameness. His works are fraught with references to humanist values. It may seem paradoxical that in the context of his quest for identity he manages to combine universalist values with ethnic ones. His writings explore the possibilities of blending the two. They exemplify the possibility of presenting in a dialogical manner the postcolonial discourse of Otherness and the universalist discourse of Sameness.

**Diran Adebayo**’s fiction represents a fight against racial Otherness and a plea for bringing to the fore categories of class and culture which are far more substantial and adequate for comparing people. He projects identity as a process in the course of which a desire for complete Otherness has to be abandoned. Efforts to assimilate and syncretism are held in high esteem in his case. His protagonist undergoes a development – from a confused young man with many homes to choose from, he turns into a mature one who sees and appreciates the necessity of intercultural change. For Adebayo any form of extreme Othering, irrespective of its good or bad intentions, is a discursive strategy that is unacceptable because of the reduction and distortion of a reality infinitely more complex. His writings are symptomatic of what post-
colonial theory has put forward as the mutual imbrications between the identity of the colonizer and the colonized. The representation of the migrant’s identity is a combination between the formerly colonized space and, first and foremost, the host culture. He maintains that in contemporary London one cannot speak about an authentic black identity just as one cannot speak about an authentic white identity. It is rather a British identity, one that encompasses various influences and is the product of the multicultural background which is the essential characteristic of contemporary society.

The goal of this thesis has been to investigate the representation of cultural identity via contemporary literary texts and distinguish some patterns that the writers use in the process of identity formation. However, what emerges from the above remarks is that no clear pattern with respect to identitarian construction can be established. The numerous attempts to categorize writers, while not entirely futile, only account for the postmodern rejection of absolute truths. There are no universal rules of defining identity but only individual strategies. What remains valid in all cases is that identities are constituted in and through “difference” and take their meaning from that which they are not. As a result they are inherently dislocated - that is dependent on an outside that both denies them and provides the conditions of their existence.

At the core of the research was the importance of Otherness which is the analytical paradigm that both postmodernism and post-colonialism operate with. Otherness is the basis for identity construction.

The implications of identity construction are negotiated along a spectrum of possibilities ranging from Sameness to Otherness, yet without a definite and clear-cut strategy insofar as individual perceptions are unique and cannot subsume to universal verities. All three writers studied seem to agree that paying closer attention to the individual would make possible a modified post-colonialism that does not stop at exploring the calamities of colonialism in order to construct a post-colonial identity. Especially in the cases of Mistry and Adebayo human beings refuse to be primarily defined as members of their communities and seek wider spaces to locate themselves into.

Ultimately, all three cases studied emphasize the fact that there is neither an absolute identity nor an absolute difference between people belonging to various cultures because there is no static identity. Identity is always in a flux, in movement. It can be a matter of affiliation and
loyalty as well as one of skin color, history, nationality and ethnicity. It is the subject who always plays an active role in the process of identity formation.

I believe that the issue of identity construction will gain increasing importance in the future. Challenges of globalization represent a field which will affect the future profoundly. They will change how we conceive and organize nationhood and culture in the process of our coming to terms with economic and political discrepancies that inform conflicts over globalization. This is very likely to bring a renewed focus on culture and concepts of civilization as primary markers of identity. This study has only been a starting point as it does provide answers while, at the same time, it opens new possibilities of analysis and research into one of the most dramatic contemporary challenges.
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